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ABSTRACT

This document presents the history of television research in India and reviews related studies conducted during three different time-spans. Part one discusses research done prior to 1975, which concentrated primarily on the evaluation of the effectiveness of television as a medium of instruction both in elementary and secondary schools and for farmers and persons working with villagers. The second part describes the one-year (1975-1976) Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE), the world's largest techno-social experiment, which has provided data on television communications within the cultural context of Indian villages and the role of television in initiating change. An evaluative overview of the total project, including social education, is given. Part three includes post-SITE studies that: (1) measured the level of television utilization in development and education; (2) were associated with television expansion; (3) investigated the organization and management of television systems; (4) looked at advertising research; and (5) considered video penetration and its effects on television viewing. The paper concludes with suggestions for further research that would evaluate and examine the extent of television's contribution to image building. (7 references) (CGD)

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TELEVISION STUDIES IN INDIA : THE STATE OF THE ART

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TELEVISION STUDIES IN INDIA : THE STATE OF THE ART

The history of Indian Television is just about a quarter of a century old with its humble beginning in 1959. The Indian television known as **Doordarshan** (a literal translation of tele and vision; vision from a distance), went through the incubation process in radio, and after almost 16 years of radio cradle, it reached adolescence, to be an independent entity in 1976. The decade that followed saw its maturation and unprecedented expansion. Doordarshan today can claim to be one of the worlds largest satellite based telecast system covering over a 500 million population of viewers on a terrestrial system of India's approximately 800 million people who also receive television signals through direct broadcast. The history of Indian television research, hence, is closely linked with the radio audience research, literally lifted from the British Broadcasting Corporation in colonial India, prior to its independence in 1947. While discussing the television studies in India, a historical perspective seems to be eminently important, as it has had remarkable influence on the structure, organisation, research topics and publication policies of the television studies that were conducted until recently. It is in this milieu that an attempt to present an analysis of the television research traditions is being made. One year Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) conducted during 1975-76 provides the marker point for presenting the review as a large number of television studies were conducted during this period. Accordingly the analysis will be presented in three parts. In the first part, all the before SITE studies strictly following

audience research method will be discussed. In the second part, SITE research will be described and methods that were followed in SITE studies will be analysed. In the third part, those closely associated with television expansion in India and related studies will be touched upon. Broadly various television studies in each part will be discussed under three sub-heading. These are (a) formative (b) process and (c) summative, although earlier it was discussed under five sub-headings (Agrawal 1981 a). In addition, it will touch upon management and advertising research - an aspect little known, but of immense importance and implications for communication researchers in the third world and else where.

Several, social science research traditions namely Anthropology, Sociology, Extension Education, Education and Psychology significantly influenced the television researches in India. Each discipline's theoretical and methodological preoccupations are reflected in majority of the studies. In almost every available SITE research document, it has been asserted that SITE research "was conceived as **inter** and **multi** disciplinary, involving many disciplines of social sciences" (Agrawal 1976 a; 1977 b).

Figure I provides a graphic representation and the inter-linkages of disciplines, research types and time periods of television research.

Television Studies Under Radio Patronage

In the early years of television studies in India, three groups of social scientists who got involved were directly or indirectly connected with education. They exclusively devoted their energies to measure the

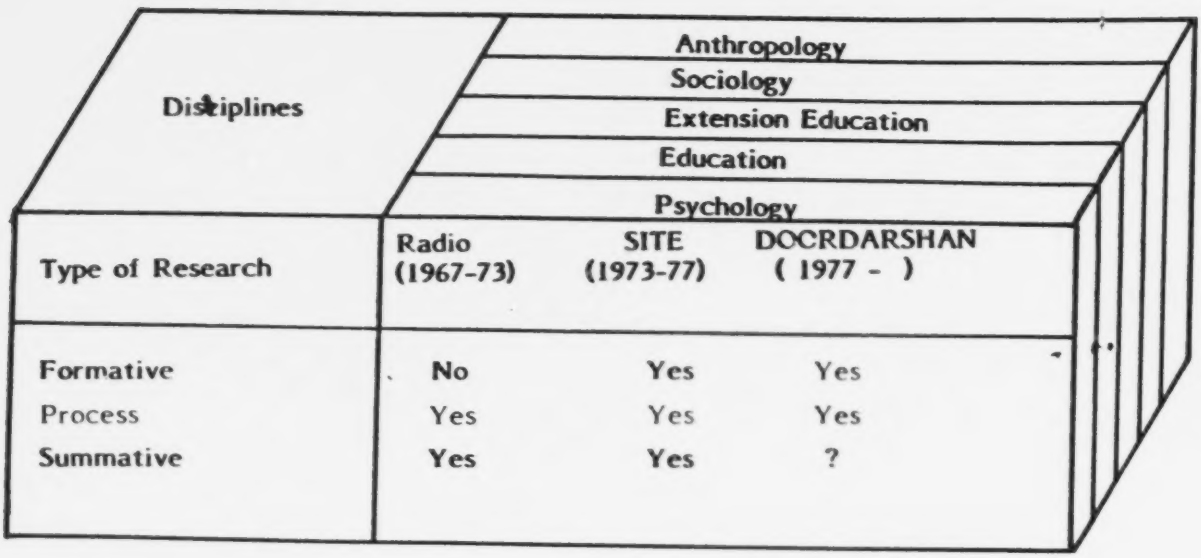


Figure 1: Showing Research Discipline, Types and Time Periods

effectiveness of television as a medium of instruction and social education. International agencies played an important role in promoting television research. Within two years after the introduction of television in India, the Delhi school television project, was initiated to promote the use of television for formal education at the higher secondary level. This being, the first educational television programme it was amply supported and was evaluated in its totality. An American sociologist Paul Neurath conducted the first evaluative study on the effects of television on the higher secondary school. His research vividly brought out the learning experience in conducting a television research in the formal system of education. Neurath's study was a regular sociological study, using a historical and documentary approach for describing the Delhi School Television project in its educational and cultural milieu. For measuring the effectiveness a survey design was followed, in which both experimental and controlled schools were selected for data collection. The conclusion were even much more cautious. "By and large the television schools did some what better in the tests than did the non-television schools" (Neurath nd : 62). While there is no clear indication that formative researches were conducted for evaluating the need of the students, existing documents indicate that the production team in collaboration with content matter experts (in this case educationists) carefully examined the needs of the students before deciding the topics. However, very little effort was made to study the suitability of formats, information load and methods of presentation. Also, no researches were conducted related to language suitability as the programmes were to be telecast within a limited

area of Delhi. Several feedback methods were evolved, but these were mostly in the form of weekly or monthly reports to be mechanically filled by the concerned teachers and schools for the use of higher-ups. How did the feedback studies influence the television production and modify the existing system of transmission is not known. But, there are good indications that the "feedback" reports were seriously considered by production and transmission authorities. On the whole, educational television was closely linked with the related researches, which over a period of time lost its importance once the television transmission became routinised and international agencies supporting the project withdrew from the scene. Few theses in the department of education were also attempted, a venture that still continues. The educationists were and are seriously wanting to measure micro-level knowledge gain, as a result of television viewing. Also, they were looking at the potential use of television in improving the quality of television and to act as an aid in the education process.

Another television project that attracted the attention of agricultural extension researches was **'Krishi Darshan'**. Krishi Darshan (literally means agricultural vision) was an attempt for the use of television for the instruction of farmers to improve the agricultural productivity. It was again a pilot project initiated after nine years of television introduction in India on January 26, 1967. Twice a week, about half an hour time was devoted for the telecast of special agricultural programmes to provide latest information on forming technology. Since then this programme continues to be telecast with increased frequency for a large part of the country. Between 1967 and 1972

a series of processess and summative studies were conducted to measure the effects of agricultural programmes. The basic assumption in all these studies had been that external information provided through television would change the attitude and supplement knowledge gain of the farmers and would help in the adoption of agricultural innovations. The single most important theoretical postulation that influenced all these studies was the five stage "adoption model" (Rogers 1962). Even after the publication of several articles and books rejecting the five stages of the adoption model of innovations, television studies related to agricultural programmes followed the same model. American influence on television studies was most discernable and prominent in this period. To some extent the influence is continuing. Without exception, television studies related to agricultural programmes followed the survey approach. In most of these studies the **'before'** and **'after'** experimental design was used. Few process studies that were conducted were essentially a part of the larger summative evaluation. These studies in general provided, insights for future programme, production and planning. The most important gains from these studies were related to the operations and maintenance of community television for rural development - an idea which has received great attention in India. The researches related to community television continues to draw attention in India as it is believed that individual television ownership will remain a privilege of a few.

During this period some efforts were also made to study the viewers reaction on day-to-day basis, but majority of these studies end up looking at the mechanics of television operation, specially in community television viewing situation. Historical records do not support the

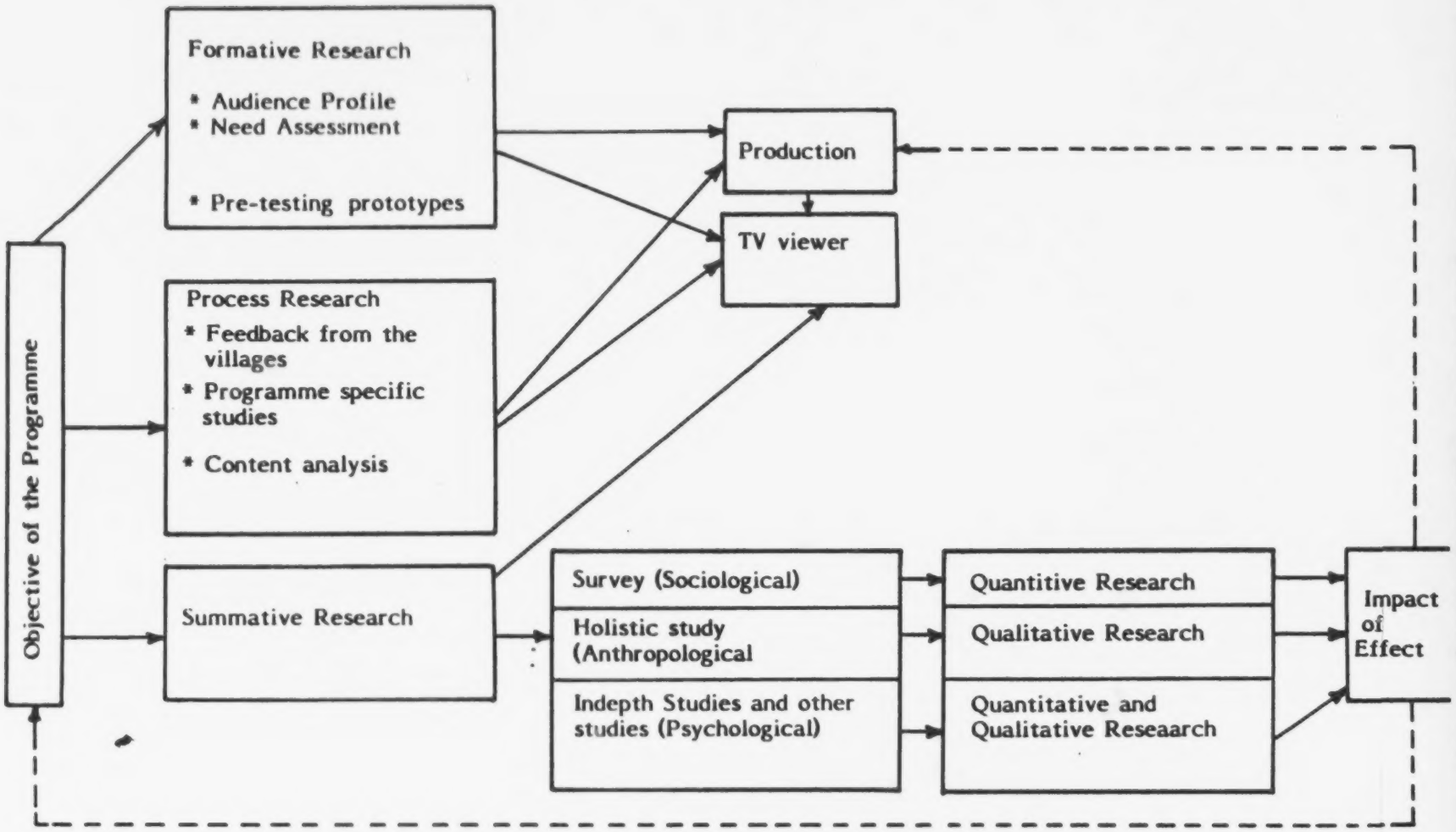
view that European research models especially the methods and techniques used in BBC were initiated or even used in the process studies. As Indian television during this period did not carry any commercial advertisements, marketing researches related to television advertisements were rare, though there is evidence to support the view that advertising agencies were wanting to use television for advertisements based on these studies. Some studies were carried out by the Audience Research Unit of All India Radio (AIR) to measure the viewership and programme preferences. It would not be far from the truth to say that two divergent views were in vogue at this juncture in the Indian television studies. On one side, a serious effort to use communication researches for improving the quality of television production and to study the effects. On the other side an aversion towards conducting any television study. These two divergent views are somewhat converged in the latter part which will be discussed.

Television Studies during SITE

One of the significant aspects of Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) related to a conscious decision on the part of experimenters was to have a total evaluation of the project including social evaluation. The social evaluation was the responsibility of the Indian side, in this Indo-American joint venture. It is precisely for this reason, apart from other reasons, all efforts were made by the Indian Space Research Organisation (one of the main partners of the experiment) to provide research input in production process and to study the effects

of the experiment on the target viewers. While the scientific objectivity demanded that the project must be evaluated, there was also a compulsion to do so. These factors contributed a great deal in setting up of a very large communication research group in the Indian Space Research Organisation, when its leaders failed to convince the social scientists of India, about the importance of SITE and its social ramifications and implications to future satellite communications systems in India. Also SITE as the world's largest techno-social experiment laid the foundation of television research in India, which in many ways continues as a legacy of SITE (and is still some times referred to as SITE Continuity Research). The SITE research also laid the foundation for target oriented studies as its primary viewers were divided between adults and school going children in the age group of 5-12 years. Within the adult group, special target viewers like primary school teachers, village level workers, and farmers further segmented the study groups. While majority of the SITE related studies were conducted by specially selected social scientists of the Indian Space Research Organisation, some were also conducted by individuals and research institutions. SITE research followed a conceptual frame which is described in Figure 2. The three research traditions of anthropology, sociology and psychology were followed in SITE research. SITE was conceived as a continuing activity for Indian National Satellite (INSAT) programme rather than a terminal one. The social scientists with their discipline based theoretical orientation, collectively and sometimes independently started conducting television related studies. Their central concern was to define the cultural characteristics of television viewers, their needs and to produce research support to improve the technical and educational content of television programmes. At times

Figure 2 : Conceptual Frame for Communications Research in SITE



the theoretical pre-occupations of the social scientists came in direct conflict with the requirements of the television producers, on other occasions it came very handy. For example, with the help of anthropologist Benedict's (1934) configurational approach the audience profiles were prepared. Around the configuration the total culture was portrayed giving a psycho-cultural picture which was needed to help producers to know their television viewers. Keeping in view the multi-linguistic characteristic of Indian television viewers, detailed linguistic analyses were also made to find out if there could be a "common" language of television acceptable to viewers of several languages. In methodological terms, most of these studies followed qualitative, descriptive field methods supported by quantitative and secondary data. It would be important to point out that such a research technique was quite close to traditional anthropological methods, generally used in rural and tribal studies. Similarly, need assessment studies followed anthropologist Goodenough (1963), while analysing viewers needs like, "felt needs", "observed needs" and "real needs". While audience profile need assessment studies were influenced by anthropological traditions, the programme pre-testing were influenced by psychological and educational traditions. The Children's Television Workshop (CTW) model of the United States of America provided the back-bone for the pre-testing of Children's Television programme and some of the adult programmes. The innovative part in these studies were related to the application of these methods in culture specific contexts. For example, testing of script in pre-production phase was followed and strongly recommended, keeping in view the lingustic hierarchy and diversity that exists within a given language in India,

leave aside different languages. The assumption in doing so was that it would lead to better production, hence better effect at lower cost to achieve the educational goals. It would not be out of place to mention that this was the first time in India that any formative research was conducted on such a scale. These pretestings, later known to be as "quick and dirty" research were found very useful by the producers. The most important outcome of the SITE formative research was the beginning of the "team mode of television production". This tradition of research by and large has fairly spread in Indian television production within Doordarshan, outside Doordarshan and specially among educational institutions that make children's television programmes as programmes for higher education. There is no doubt that there is a varying degree of research involvement and commitment, but it is in no way an unknown commodity for policy-makers, producers and social researchers in India, today. However, there is a lack of serious training facility in this area, a point that must be kept in view while discussing television studies in the Indian context.

Process Research

SITE once again provided an unique opportunity to conduct feedback studies on a regular basis. During the SITE year, the researchers lived in the villages to collect feedback data on regular basis. Given the field situation, there is no other way to collect feedback data as earlier experiences have indicated that data collected through village television custodians was unreliable. Although, a very sound research design was conceived for feedback studies, the feedback reports did not find favour with the producers. Modifications were made both in method of data

collection and in presentation. As of now, no nation-wide method of feedback has been evolved on a regular basis. Though from time to time, market research organisations have started bringing out "ratings" of selected programmes after the introduction of commercial advertisements on television. Also these feedback reports have been focussing on the urban television owning families, and very little is known about rural viewers. There is a need to evolve better feedback research designs applicable to rural urban Indian situtations for different target audiences, to help producers, decision makers and policy makers.

Content analysis is considered an indirect but systematic method for observing and analysing, expressed television behaviour. During SITE and after SITE, several content analyses studies have been made. Typically, the methods evolved in the United States, have been followed in content analysis studies. Agricultural programmes were content analysed, along with several developmental programmes. However, there is not a single study where any serious efforts have been made to relate the effects and the content of the television programme. It would be desirable to develop methods and techniques of content analysis in the Indian cultural context at a national and regional level, given the linguistic multiplicity. Such an analysis will provide possible indirect effects of television on both national and regional languages and linguistic behaviour, little investigated so far. At present the microscopic minority of television viewers share an international language, English and largely spoken variant of Hindi which has not, permitted such an analysis. In the future such television studies, would be of great relevance.

Summative Research

A summative research in the Indian television to measure its effect started from its inception. During SITE intensive field work using a holistic approach in a comparative perspective to understand the process of television communication within the cultural context was conducted in nine states of India for a period of about 18 months. It had three distinct methodological advantages in providing (a) intensive — first hand data (b) a great deal of indepth and intimate understanding of the process of communication and change and (c) descriptive analysis of the socio-cultural reality depicted as a whole - the whole being a SITE village. The theoretical assumption was that an Indian village can be conceived as a whole for such a research study. The results of these studies provided microlevel process data on village communication and the role of television in initiating change. To what extent this research method for studying television effects is useful in other Asian and African cultures need to be discussed in the culture-specific context. Keeping in view the historical development of television research, vis-a-vis other social sciences, the question raised here is whether there can be a research tool free from being "culture specific" allowing deeper probing and understanding of communication process in situ to be utilized. The psychological methods and techniques were used to measure the impact of television viewing on the school children. Broadly the study design consisted of experimental design of experimental (SITE) and control (non-SITE) school children of III and IV grades. A similar design was followed for measuring the effects of television on adult television viewers. Theoretically in all these studies, it was assumed that the information provided through television would go through a process

of adoption which could be measured by using an experimental research design as done in several studies all over the world. Two major deviations in the research design in case of SITE relate to an unequal control and experimental sample sizes, and an additional observation "during" SITE in addition to pre and post observations. What are some of its methodological implications? No serious discussions have taken place among the social scientists on these issues in India and outside India.

During this period an effort to conduct television studies to measure the level of utilization in development and education was conducted along with the study of organisation and management of the television system. Generally, these studies followed the social science research approach in which the case study approach and participant observation technique was most common. These studies provided new insights into the organisation, management and the motivation aspects of projects like SITE. In a way such studies have broken new grounds for the understanding of modern operational organisations like television production and transmission. There is a need for management studies of television organisations of India and elsewhere, because its understanding would help integrate modern communication systems into the existing management structures. Television studies in India should not be considered complete without understanding the ominipresent cinema in the Indian television. Very little is known about the factors associated with the comparative preferences between cinema and television. It is a matter of common knowledge that a 'cinema show' on television is considered the most popular programme, breaking all linguistic barriers. However, we do not have much empirical evidence to know the reasons and factors associated with this popularity. Television studies will not be complegte without taking this aspect of cinema into consideration. It is therefore

suggested that future television studies must take this aspect into consideration.

Technology Leapfrog Without Research

Most of the television studies that were conceived or initiated during SITE, continued after the Indian National Satellite (INSAT) was launched and rapid expansion of television took place in India. Two significant events that occured in the process are (1) the transmission of Hindi and English television programmes for the entire country, where more than 15 languages are spoken, each having a literary tradition of several centuries, and (2) the research studies shifted its attention from formative and process research to programme rating and programme viewing coupled with serious efforts on the part of marketing research organisations to monopolize the use of television for creating consummerism in India. These efforts have given a third dimension to television studies in India. It is no accident that in 1981, TV Audience Survey Viewership Measurement and Reactions to Advertisements (New Delhi; A report by Directorate General : Doordarshan) was conducted. During the same period under the pressure of the private sector the television authorities appointed a committee to rationalize the advertisement rates for television. Now the flood-gate is open and a large sum of money is being invested in television studies both for producing slick programmes to attract audience attention and to measure the effectiveness of advertisements. Of course majority of these studies are fairly obscure and out of public sight, but being carefully read by the advertising moghuls to advise their clients and to take decisions regarding television advertising investments. It would be difficult at this stage to predict whether these studies will follow the western models

of television research or would there be an evolution of Indian research methods in this area.

Video has taken the Indian television viewer by storm. There is a very high ratio of video cassette recorder owning families vis-a-vis television in India. It has brought out another dimension for television studies in India. Some efforts have been made to study the video penetration and its effects on television viewing. Preliminary studies indicate that video viewing has curtailed television viewing time, along with cinema viewing. Few believe that the video might relegate television to second position but this needs to be studied. It is suggested that future television studies in India must include video viewing, its effects while conducting any study relating to television.

There has been a recurrent argument among the protoganists that television ostentatiously was brought to India for education and development and it must be appropriately utilized for this purpose. They have also argued that television should not become a toy of entertainment for the rich. Since 1975, it has also been pointed out that television has been used for image building. The unstated aim of television expansion was to help build images. However, very little research is available to examine this question in detail. It would be appropriate to conduct several studies to evaluate and examine to what extent, television as a medium of communication has contributed in image building and to what extent has it been used for this purpose with substantial results. These research questions gain greater importance in the light of television ownership and viewership in India and specially when there is a lukewarm and low priority given for providing public access to television in India.

Another issue which is gaining greater attention by some researchers, relates to the de facto use of television for keeping a large proportion of India's population from making greater demand for sharing power and scarce resources. Some have reported to it as a "capitalistic conspiracy of communication". In simpler terms, the argument put forward is, that there is a conscious and planned real effort to use the medium for creating the images of chaotic social tension, conflict and violence to keep the aspiring poor to fight amongst themselves so that the rich could continue to hog the scarce resources and to centralize the power by careful manipulation of the mass media especially, visual media like cinema and television. Beyond public pronouncements, public debates and political insinuations, little research work has been done to analyse at any length, as to what is really happening to the Indian television and its viewing, and to what extent is there any substance in these pronouncements. Longitudinal studies will be needed to measure such effects, if any, which ought to be done in India and other countries. If television is creating an imformation gap between the poor and the rich it ought to be a national concern, as an equal access to information for the functioning of a a democratic country is a necessary condition and it ought to be ensured.

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